DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 456 718 HE 034 275

AUTHOR	Burgstahler, Sheryl; Duclos, Rachel; Turcotte, Michelle
TITLE	Preliminary Findings: Faculty, Teaching Assistant, and Student Perceptions Regarding Accommodating Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Environments.
PUB DATE	2000-05-00
NOTE	22p.; The DO-IT project is funded by the U.S. Department of Education through Grant #P33A990042.
PUB TYPE	Reports - Research (143)
EDRS PRICE	MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS	*Academic Accommodations (Disabilities); *College Faculty; College Students; Disabilities; Focus Groups; Higher Education; *Professional Development; *Teaching Assistants

ABSTRACT

Focus groups were conducted to inform and support the development of faculty, teaching assistant, and administrator training materials and strategies as part of the Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology (DO-IT) Prof project at the University of Washington, Seattle. Focus groups were conducted at the 23 postsecondary institutions in the DO-IT Prof project, which serves to improve the knowledge and skills of faculty related to the inclusion of students with disabilities. Twelve faculty focus groups involving 41 faculty members and 4 staff members examined experiences working with students with disabilities, problems, understanding of legal responsibilities, and perceptions of additional knowledge needed to serve students with disabilities. A focus group for teaching assistants (one group of four assistants) explored similar issues. Six student focus groups involving a total of 21 students with disabilities examined what students knew about existing services and their legal rights, their experiences with instructors, and other student concerns. The preliminary findings from these groups indicate that various training models are needed to meet the needs of a wide range of faculty, including workshops, reference materials, and longer seminars. Faculty and teaching assistants want information that focuses on accommodation methods rather than specific disabilities. Because of the range of student experiences and perceptions, an effective plan to institutionalize and integrate services and programs should include a needs assessment tailored for an individual campus. (Contains 19 references.) (SLD)

Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made
from the original document.

ED 456 718

Preliminary Findings:
Faculty, Teaching Assistant, and Student Perceptions Regarding Accommodating Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Environments

Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.
Rachel Duclos, M.Ed.
Michelle Turcotte

S. Burgstahler

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
Office of Educational Research and Improvement
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)
✓ This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.
• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official OERI position or policy.

HE031975

BEST COPY AVAILABLE

Preliminary Findings:
Faculty, Teaching Assistant, and Student Perceptions Regarding Accommodating Students with Disabilities in Postsecondary Environments

Sheryl Burgstahler, Ph.D.
Rachel Duclos, M.Ed.
Michelle Turcotte

DO-IT (Disabilities, Opportunities, Internetworking, and Technology)
University of Washington, Seattle, Washington

May 2000

Introduction

The landmark Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 prohibits discrimination on the basis of disability. The ADA has great significance because it is the first comprehensive federal civil rights statute protecting people with disabilities from discrimination in all facets of life: transportation, public accommodations, telecommunications, academic programs, and employment. The ADA reinforces the requirements for those agencies, including postsecondary institutions, previously covered by Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and extends the reach to other organizations.

Even with legislation in place, individuals with disabilities continue to face barriers to higher education. In 1996, 6% of undergraduates in a nationally representative student sample reported having a disability. In this sample, students with disabilities attending postsecondary institutions were less likely to be enrolled in four-year institutions and more likely to be enrolled in two-year institutions; moreover, students with disabilities are also less likely to successfully transition to four-year schools (Horn & Bobbitt, 1999). Students with disabilities are also less likely than their counterparts without disabilities to stay enrolled or to earn a postsecondary degree or credential. In a survey of undergraduates who had enrolled in postsecondary education for the first time within the previous five years, 53% of students with disabilities had attained a degree or vocational certificate or were still enrolled, compared with 64% of their counterparts without disabilities. Among students with disabilities, 16% attained a bachelor's degree, 6% attained an associate's degree; and 19% earned a vocational certificate. The corresponding percentages for students without disabilities were 27%, 12% and 13%, respectively (Horn & Bobbitt, 1999).

HE034275

Obstacles to equitable participation in postsecondary institutions include lack of adequate support systems, little access to successful role models, lack of awareness and access to technology that can increase independence and productivity, and negative attitudes and low expectations on the part of faculty and staff with whom they interact (Aksamit, Leuenberger & Morris, 1987; Burns, Armistead & Keys, 1990; "Changing America," 1989; Dunn, 1996; Fonosch & Schwab, 1981; Malcolm & Matyas, 1991.) The National Science Foundation task force (Changing America, 1989) has found that negative attitudes are the single most significant barrier faced by individuals with disabilities in higher education, particularly in highly technical fields. Additional barriers reported by people with disabilities include lack of encouragement to prepare for challenging fields where they are traditionally underrepresented, and challenges in bridging the gaps between high schools, community colleges, four-year schools, graduate programs, and employment. In addition, many faculty and administrators have a limited knowledge of disability rights laws and of appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities in the classroom (Leyser, Vogel, Wyland & Brulle, 1998).

The focus groups described in this paper were conducted to inform and support the development of faculty, teaching assistant, and administrator training materials and strategies as part of the *DO-IT Prof* project, based at the University of Washington, Seattle. *DO-IT Prof* serves to improve the knowledge and skills of postsecondary faculty and administration in order to make them better prepared to fully include students with disabilities in academic programs on their campuses. The project is funded by a three year grant from the U.S. Department of Education (grant #P33A990042). The *DO-IT Prof* project team is comprised of faculty, disabled student services officers, and other administrators at postsecondary institutions in 23 states. Team members were selected to participate based on potential to contribute to project goals, geographic diversity, and type of institution.

The focus groups comprised of students with disabilities examined their experiences with receiving accommodations on their campuses, their experiences working with faculty, and their impressions of how faculty could become more prepared to include students with disabilities in their classrooms. The focus groups with faculty and teaching assistants examined their experiences working with students with disabilities, their knowledge of and level of satisfaction with disabled student services, their previous training experience, and their ideas about effective professional development methods and content.

Methods

Focus groups were conducted at the postsecondary institutions of *DO-IT Prof* team members. Team members are faculty, disabled student services officers and other administrators from 23 postsecondary institutions. These institutions are a diverse group and include research institutions, liberal arts institutions, community colleges, and technical colleges; the faculty, teaching assistants, and students with disabilities participating in the focus groups reflect this diversity.

DO-IT Prof staff developed and distributed focus group guides to the project team members. These guides included information and guidelines on human subjects concerns, recruitment, focus group moderation, focus group questions, and summarizing and reporting data. The guides were intended to clarify and standardize the recruitment process, the group structure, and the role of the moderator. Recruitment was then conducted by the project team members via departmental postings, electronic postings on listservs, and personal and professional contacts.

The focus groups were approximately 90 minutes long and targeted three homogeneous groups: faculty, teaching assistants, and students with disabilities. The focus groups with faculty and teaching assistants examined their experiences working with and accommodating students with disabilities, their experiences working with disabled student services offices, and their experience participating in disability related professional development opportunities. The focus groups also examined their impressions about what instructors need to know about working with students with disabilities and their preferences for delivery of professional development. The focus group questions for faculty and teaching assistants were:

- Describe your positive and negative experiences working with students with disabilities. Describe your familiarity with services on your campus which provide accommodations to students with disabilities and your level of satisfaction (if applicable) with these services.
- In which types of course/activities has it been especially difficult for you to provide appropriate accommodations?
- What is your understanding of legal responsibilities to accommodate students with disabilities?
- Have you ever heard of or been offered professional development opportunities to learn how to work with students with disabilities? Did you participate? What did it involve? How was it scheduled? Was it satisfactory?
- Tell me what you think faculty and teaching assistants need to know about working with students with disabilities.
- If you were offered professional development on accommodating students with disabilities, which method(s) of delivery would you prefer and why? Short presentation within a departmental or other meeting? 1/2 day workshop? Short informational brochure? Comprehensive reference book? Website? Informal discussion with colleagues? Email-based distance learning?

The focus groups with students with disabilities examined their experiences with receiving accommodations on their campuses, their specific positive and negative experiences working with faculty, and their impressions about how faculty could become better prepared to more fully include students with disabilities in their classes. The focus group questions for students with disabilities were:

- Tell me what you know about the services on your campus that provide accommodations to students with disabilities and describe your level of satisfaction with these services.
- Describe the accommodations you have used and how you obtained them.
- Tell me about the courses or activities where it has been the most difficult to obtain appropriate accommodations.
- What is your understanding of the legal responsibilities of colleges and universities to accommodate students with disabilities?
- Tell me about specific experiences, positive and negative, that you have had with instructors (e.g., professors and teaching assistants) regarding accommodation issues.
- How could instructors become better prepared to include students with disabilities in their courses? What information would be most useful for them to have?

Project staff received transcripts from 19 focus groups. They include 12 faculty focus groups, 6 student focus groups and 1 teaching assistant focus group. Focus groups were comprised of a total of 21 students with disabilities, 45 faculty members and staff, and 4 teaching assistants. This report is a summary developed from reading the transcripts, but is not based on comprehensive data analysis. We have highlighted responses that are in consensus, as well as those that are idiosyncratic or minority opinions. The complete data analysis process will include computerized analysis based on the following primary variables:

- Problems - originating with the student, originating with the faculty, and originating within the institution's organizational structure
- Solutions - utilized by the student, implemented in the classroom, or located systemically

Additional variables to be examined (influencing problems and solutions) are field or discipline of faculty and students, type of disability, and the role of technology in educational accommodations for students.

Faculty Focus Groups

Twelve faculty focus groups were conducted at 12 institutions. Forty-one faculty members and 4 staff members participated. A diverse range of institution types were represented, including 7 urban institutions, 1 rural institution and 4 suburban institutions and 4 two-year institutions and 8 four-year institutions. A range of disciplines among faculty participants were also represented, including the humanities, life and physical sciences, social sciences, allied health fields, fine arts, and mathematics. Faculty participants varied in terms of teaching or research orientation.

Positive and Negative Experiences Working With Students With Disabilities

Describe your positive and negative experiences working with students with disabilities.

In commenting on their positive experiences, some faculty stated that having disabled students in their classrooms challenged them to accommodate a variety of learning styles and reflect on their pedagogy and methods. Faculty felt that disabled students increased class cohesion and opened class discussion. Faculty had especially positive stories to tell about students, most of whom had physical disabilities, who were open about their disability with their professor and classmates, knew what accommodations they needed, and were motivated to achieve academic success.

In describing their negative experiences, faculty often commented that negative experiences with disabled students are rare. Faculty expressed frustration that students do not always identify themselves as disabled and with students who cannot tell faculty which accommodations work well for them. Faculty find it difficult to accommodate without adequate time and information. Students who display an "entitled" or negative attitude are also difficult to work with, and faculty are resistant to modifying their course standards for these students because they believe that they misuse their diagnosis. Finally, faculty agreed that physical disabilities were challenging to accommodate because of architectural barriers. Specific comments of the focus groups participants include:

"As far as positive experiences it is always a challenge because it involves modifications and changes...It makes you think about the way you work."

"My experiences have been nothing but positive in the way they've interacted with me as a faculty member, and ease with forming accommodations for them."

"Students don't always appreciate that they have a role to play in the process."

"We all put it in our syllabi with the intent that the student will come to us and let us know that their needs are. If they don't come to us, how do you broach the subject?"

"So my own negative experiences may just come from thinking, I wish I had more time to do this."

"A lot of it was basically upon the student. I've had students that were absolutely wonderful and really added to the class and other students who were just very belligerent."

Especially Difficult Activities

In which types of courses/activities has it been especially difficult for you to provide appropriate accommodations?

Many of the especially difficult activities that were identified by faculty members were related to computer use. Faculty identified software exercises, Power Point™ presentations, and flashing computer screens as particularly challenging. Individual faculty also depicted a range of activities made difficult because of architectural barriers including field experiences, science labs, and basic access to classrooms and institutional

facilities. Although not always mentioned in response to this question, many faculty frequently commented on difficulty in determining appropriate test accommodations for students with learning and psychological disabilities. Specific comments from the focus group participants included:

"One thing that is difficult involves reading software used in my lab, particularly with a student with a vision impairment or a student possibly with epilepsy where the words flashing trigger a seizure."

"Remote TV production is really tough for students in wheelchairs. We have a semitruck that we use to tape on location and when we purchased it and purchased it used, we tried to find one that had a ramp on the back like a U-Haul style ramp which interestingly enough is one inch too narrow for the narrowest of wheelchair wheels."

Legal Responsibilities

What is your understanding of legal responsibilities to accommodate students with disabilities?

Most faculty knew very little about their legal responsibilities and rely on student support services for information. They find the legal requirements for "reasonable accommodations" vague and unclear, but they do understand the importance of confidentiality. Specific statements from the focus group participants included:

"I just go by whatever form we get from the Disabled Student Services office."

"My approach is just to follow your orders. Whatever you guys say I'll do to the best of my ability."

"Something that I am not real sure of in class are what my rights are as a teacher? Who we can talk to about a situation and what information can be relayed legally? Who can we talk with to get help? And what legalities do we have for ourselves and safety, what legalities do we have for the rest of the students in the class versus the legal things that a student has that disrupts the class."

"I know that we are legally obligated to provide accommodation 'within reason'. I think it is the 'within reason' that is ambiguous. For some of us in the math department, should we be waiving all math requirements for someone who has a math handicap?"

"I thought legally it was just to do everything possible to make sure that they have the opportunity to take the class."

Knowledge of Service and Level of Satisfaction

Describe your familiarity with services on your campus which provide accommodations to students with disabilities and your level of satisfaction (if applicable) with these services.

Faculty knowledge about disability services differs between institutions, and there are some differences within schools. At numerous institutions, faculty are familiar with the disability services staff and are very satisfied with the services although they think that more funding and resources are needed. At other schools, faculty had no or minimal information about services for students with disabilities. With the exception of a few, most faculty had little or no information about available services other than the campus disabled student services office. One faculty member expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of communication between career counselors, rehabilitation and disability services staff. A few faculty expressed dissatisfaction with unreliable interpreters, notetakers and film captioning. A pervasive dilemma was that disabled student services are not integrated into schools' systems so faculty and students have to continually depend on the disabled student services office to adapt and modify systems. Specific remarks by the focus group participants included:

"I have had a lot of support from the DSS [Disabled Student Services] office. I don't think they are funded well enough. They can't be doing a lot of things they ought to be doing, and they know that. I have not had anything but respect for them and positive experiences."

"No familiarity. No opinion."

"There really are, in my field, two different populations: the people who know about disabilities and the people that know about career planning and career resources. Very frequently, the same individual doesn't know about both issues."

"I'm not saying every office should have someone who is an expert in these issues, but certainly systems within the university (school of nursing, school of education, whatever), there needs to be, just as we have gender equity and racial issues addressed across the campus, disability issues are huge and growing."

"Institutionally, I think our university has done an absolutely abysmal job of planning for access for disabled students."

Professional Development Opportunities

Have you ever heard of or been offered professional development opportunities to learn how to work with students with disabilities? Did you participate? What did it involve? How was it scheduled? Was it satisfactory?

Faculty's experience with professional development opportunities varied. Some faculty had been offered a few opportunities for development during new staff orientation,

faculty meetings or through disabled student services workshops, but some did not recall any opportunities. Most of those who had identified having professional development opportunities had minimal or no participation. Some faculty did not find the opportunities user friendly because they were either at inconvenient times or in written form. The types of opportunities that faculty found useful included student panels and presentations, presentations or workshops attached to departmental meetings, and workshops with active participation. Faculty had strong opinions about the length of the training, but there were diverse opinions about what constituted a desirable length; training perceived as too long or too short was reported as frustrating. Specific comments from focus group participants included:

"If you had an announcement...I would have read it and said, 'oh, there's a workshop that I'm not going to go to.'"

"I don't recall anything in our department. This is my second year, so maybe there was something a few years ago, but I don't recall anything."

"Going through new faculty orientation, someone showed up and gave us a little binder. The problem is that's another stack of papers and another binder on my shelf that I have no chance to read. That's why I'm not sure that's the best means, and I think workshops and roundtables in a condensed time is useful."

"I have been to a number of student panel discussions that worked very well."

"One I went to ... must have been 8 or 9 years ago. It was excellent. They brought a speaker in. It was for academic staff. They had us doing a lot of different activities."

What Faculty Need to Know

Tell me what you think faculty need to know about working with students with disabilities.

Many faculty across institutions had very similar ideas about what they need to know. The bodies of knowledge that they want information about fall into two broad categories: 1) discussion of perceived ethical tensions in maintaining classroom fairness while providing accommodations, particularly with learning and psychiatric disabilities, and 2) information about how to provide specific accommodations. Suggestions for training content included information about the ADA; discussion of what constitutes fair and reasonable accommodation; basic knowledge of American Sign Language; disabled student services resources; resource binders describing the specific disabilities, particularly "invisible" disabilities, and accommodation strategies; information on how to handle medical and other emergencies; and students' perspectives. Faculty with some experience accommodating students noted that it is important to know that accommodating a student usually entails incremental, not comprehensive, changes to the course and teaching methods. Specific statements from focus group participants included:

"...sensitize the faculty to hear some success stories, hear some potential problems and ways around those problems and...to sensitize faculty to what some of the possibilities out there, kind of the range of experiences."

"...it's as if we need not only a Disability Resource Center but sort of an Ethics and Morals Resource Center."

"...suggestions about what you can do in your classroom or your legal responsibility to that student, campus resources, etc."

Preferred Methods of Delivery

If you were offered professional development on accommodating students with disabilities, which method(s) of delivery would you prefer and why?

Most faculty agreed that the key to effective delivery is convenience. They suggested tagging professional development activities onto larger college meetings, department meetings or new faculty orientation. They requested participatory, practical hands-on workshops with case studies, rather than a lecture format. They also suggested peer-to-peer training from liaisons in their department with expertise in disability issues, department-specific workshops, reference books, videos, comprehensive online web sites and longer seminars for those interested in comprehensive training. They discouraged relying solely on written information. There were varying opinions on whether or not the workshops should be mandatory and the optimum length of the workshops. Multiple delivery methods are needed to meet the needs of faculty as a group. Specific remarks from focus groups participants included:

"Seminars would be beneficial if they're done at inservice or at the very beginning. Because once the semester starts, we start getting inundated with curriculum, program reviews, whatever's coming up.""

"Tag it on to a larger college meeting."

"Half day workshops in conjunction with a brochure that we can have for everybody on campus to review."

"I like getting together. I like the dialog, brainstorming."

"There may be some people in your division that may have a particular interest and be willing to serve as a kind liaison to help distribute information, to answer questions, to provide information. Sometimes faculty members may not go out of their way to go beyond their building but to walk down the hall is easier.""

"I love the idea of a web site and I think a web site could include what was discussed earlier- a glossary of disabilities and accommodations."

Other Faculty Priorities and Concerns

Throughout the faculty focus groups, there was general consensus that the issues and challenges involved in working with students with physical disabilities are different than the issues involved in working with students with learning disabilities and psychological disabilities. Faculty were comfortable with the diagnoses of physical disabilities and were very willing to provide accommodations, but faculty were ambivalent and confused about the definitions of learning and psychological disabilities.

Faculty perceived tensions between keeping the classroom fair and equitable while providing reasonable accommodations. They had a difficult time determining how to provide accommodations and maintain fairness.

Some faculty mentioned that their training emphasizes research and content expertise more than learning styles and pedagogy; therefore, they have a difficult time knowing how to adapt their lessons to various learning styles.

Some faculty expressed discomfort when accommodations do not go smoothly. Some specific situations mentioned were late interpreters, bad notetakers and films not captioned correctly.

Some faculty expressed feeling awkward approaching students with disabilities. (Conversely, some students with disabilities wonder why faculty do not approach them.)

Part-time faculty feel at a particular disadvantage because of their reduced participation in the schools' professional development and lack of knowledge about resources.

Faculty commented on the influence of the peer group on disabled students' academic experiences, and visa versa. Peers are sometimes resentful of disabled students' accommodations, and students with disabilities do not always identify themselves for fear of stigmatization. On the other hand, students with disabilities sometimes increase class cohesion with their presence, when, for example, other students are asked to help.

Snow was frequently mentioned in certain regions as a significant barrier. Snow covered curb cuts in the sidewalks, obstructed walkways, and blocked Braille signage; plowing patterns were mentioned as making the problem worse in many cases.

Specific comments from focus group participants included:

> *"People are very focused on their academic content. It's often hard to pull them away from that content, and talk about the larger issues- teaching and learning, learning styles."*

> *"I think that all divisions have a part-time orientation- somebody needs to talk to each of the division chairs and ask for some time to talk to the part-time instructors."*

"...the only really negative experience I've had was with a student with Attention Deficit Disorder who even when given accommodations never finished anything and I eventually got suspicious of just what he was doing with all the work because he really couldn't complete anything in any given period of time. I thought, well, this is a more extensive problem; perhaps with another name ultimately."

"I wonder if given the developmental state of a lot, or some, of our traditional college students if they don't all have some disability. That it is part of being 19 years old; that you always have some anxiety or some level of fear/horror/misery/depression...wish you suddenly didn't ever have to leave your room, but it's a fine line."

"The other thing that maybe falls under this heading a lot, well not a lot, but a fair number of students who have no known disabilities, who are not geniuses, who just work hard sometimes indicate to me that they really resent anyone else getting any sort of special favors."

Student Focus Groups

Six student focus groups were conducted at 6 institutions. A total of 21 students with disabilities participated. A diverse range of institution types were represented, including 3 suburban institutions, 3 urban institutions, 2 two-year institutions and 4 four-year institutions. A range of disabilities were represented among the focus group participants, including blindness, paraplegia, traumatic brain injury, learning disabilities, Cerebral Palsy, deafness, ADHD (Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder), and psychological disability.

Knowledge of Disability Services and Level of Satisfaction

Tell me what you know about the services on your campus that provide accommodations to students with disabilities and describe your level of satisfaction with these services.

In general, students were satisfied with the disability services. The services most frequently used were books on tape, notetakers, tutors, testing centers, and assistive technology labs.

Students expressed dissatisfaction with a wide variety of architectural barriers including inaccessible desks, Braille signs that are too high, snow-covered curb cuts, overcrowded classrooms and labs, and old buildings with inaccessible offices. One group reported a shortage of adaptive computer resources that results in overcrowding. Students were satisfied with the notetakers except for occasional unreliability. The books on tape were reported as helpful, but it was also noted that they take a long time to receive, especially those for advanced courses. Another group commented on the inadequacies of the disability notification letter given to faculty. When the letter is too vague (in order to

allow the professor and student develop accommodations together), they are unhelpful. Specific remarks from focus group participants included:

"Well, you're really good about everything except for books on tape. This past semester, I'm still waiting for books..."

"I had problems with books...I got this nastygram telling me that I couldn't get any more books on tape because you only have ten a semester or something from this one place."

"Professors often don't make their web pages available to screen readers."

"I've used five or six accommodations and have been overall satisfied."

Most Difficult Courses or Activities to Obtain Accommodations
Tell me about the courses or activities where it has been the most difficult to obtain appropriate accommodations.

Architectural inaccessibility issues and lack of academic accommodations from faculty were the most common complaints. Students identified numerous architectural barriers that were mentioned above. Students also noted difficulty in getting learning disability accommodations, such as extended test times, in a wide range of courses. Specific comments from focus group participants included:

"That's my only difficulty...getting to the coursework part. Once you're there, no problem."

"Most of the labs are just obviously set up for able-bodied students, and there are certain chemistry labs where you can barely get a chair in between the aisles."

"If you try to get extra time or quizzes, you miss lecture."

Understanding of Legal Responsibility
What is your understanding of the legal responsibilities of colleges and universities to accommodate students with disabilities?

Students knew that there were legal standards for institutions and professors, but they knew very little about the specific standards. One student mentioned his IEP (Individualized Educational Plan), which may indicate that some postsecondary students are unclear about the differences in legal responsibilities between high schools and postsecondary institutions. Several students expressed skepticism about the objectivity and enforceability of their legal protection. Some students reported that they hesitate to insist on an accommodation, even when they are legally entitled. Specific statements from focus group participants included:

"I'm still not exactly sure...It's legal language."

"The IEP tells of accommodations or resources you need to succeed or the university could be sued."

"But there are legal standards that say you have to do these things. If they don't, nothing really happens. It seems like there's not much of an enforcement."

"A lot of these courses deal with writing and the grading is very subjective. So, if you make too much noise what kind of grade you get at the end of it? It's not straight multiple choice tests, it's essay exams with very subjective testing."

Positive and Negative Experiences with Instructors

Tell me about specific experiences, positive and negative, that you have had with instructors (e.g., professors and teaching assistants) regarding accommodation issues.

Students described instructors who accommodated positively by acting respectfully, allowing extra time, providing tutoring, and displaying flexibility. On the other hand, the most common complaints from students were about instructors' lack of understanding about learning disabilities and breaches of confidentiality in class. Breaching confidentiality was noted as a major negative and mentioned relatively frequently (despite the apparent clarity regarding confidentiality expressed by faculty in the faculty focus groups). Students told stories of instructors telling them that they're "abusing" their disability, questioning their ability to be successful in school, and blaming them for problems they encounter as a result of their disability. Specific comments from focus group participants included:

"I've had numerous professors that go out of their way."

"A lot of profs think it's [learning disability] an excuse; they don't understand you need extra time."

"A bad experience is when a professor brings it up in front of the whole class. It is disrespectful. I've had LD [learning disability] since the second grade, so I am used to it. I gave the letter to the professor in the hallway before class. He sat down in front of class and then read the letter our loud, looking at me, in front of this class of 35-40 people."

Information and Preparation Needed by Instructors

How could instructors become better prepared to include students with disabilities in their courses? What information would be most useful for them to have?

Many students stated that their first priority for instructors would be disability etiquette and a positive attitude; disability etiquette and a positive attitude are needed more than any technical information about specific accommodations. Some students also felt that it was important for instructors to know legal requirements and information about specific disabilities, particularly learning and other invisible disabilities, and possible accommodations. Faculty need to learn a range of accommodation strategies since accommodations are not one size fits all, even with the same disability. Some students thought that information should be given to instructors in the form of mandatory workshops because "it's the instructors who would be likely to not attend that are the problem." Finally, one group of students had the idea that education for instructors and students should start in the high schools. Specific comments from focus group participants included:

"Etiquette - that's where I was going. It's knowing how to ask."

"The ones who are interested in making their classes more accessible are not the problems. It's the ones who don't care. Unless the ones who don't care have some kind of mandate from higher up- it's like we were talking earlier, the ones that want to help you, are already doing all they can."

"I just think that professors don't always understand why. This (accommodations) isn't really something I want, it's something I have to have. It's not that I'm trying to get out of doing the work that everybody else has to do, or that I'm trying to find the easy way to do something."

"My TA [teaching assistant] is having very big problems with getting things Brailled. He was in the case conference, but he doesn't seem to realize that when he makes one small change, like changing a point amount from 24 to 22, and sending that to get re-Brailled is a rather significant issue. I mean it's not just like making a copy. So, he's just not quite understanding the whole process and what's happening."

"Profs should be better prepared about LD [learning disability]."

Other Student Priorities and Concerns

Some students stated that other students as well as faculty need more education about disabilities. Some participants expressed their lack of knowledge about different types of disabilities and stated that education of the student body as well as the faculty was a priority.

Some students expressed that once they found a professor or professors who were sensitive and accommodating regarding their disability they tended to continue taking classes with that professor as long as their program would allow.

Many students with disabilities stated that they want faculty to ask them about accommodations and not treat their disability like a "taboo" topic.

Specific statements from focus group participants included:

"Asking. I mean half of the time they don't ask. Even if they want to, they don't."

"The real question is how do you get them to want to do it?"

Teaching Assistant Focus Group

One teaching assistant (TA) focus group was conducted at an urban four-year research institution. Four teaching assistants participated and represented social sciences and life and physical sciences. While the focus group was conducted to discuss the role of teaching assistants as instructors, three of the four participants were students with disabilities themselves; two participants had visual disabilities, and one participant had a learning disability.

Positive and Negative Experiences Working With Students With Disabilities

Describe your positive and negative experiences working with students with disabilities.

The teaching assistants in this focus group had had some experience working with students with disabilities, although not always in the postsecondary environment. The teaching assistants wondered if this lack of experience was due to inaccessibility of the programs, academically and architecturally, or lack of disclosure from the students.

Two teaching assistants had had some experience working with students with disabilities in a postsecondary classroom. Three of the teaching assistants had experiences outside of their teaching assistant role that included tutoring students with disabilities, working on issues of classroom integration, teaching high school English to students with disabilities, and their own experiences as students with disabilities. The teaching assistants described positive experiences in which they and their students worked cooperatively to come up with teaching strategies and study aids that accommodated the students' needs.

The teaching assistants talked about their frustration with students who did not communicate effectively about their disabilities. They expressed that students need to communicate with them (in addition to the professor) and that students need to develop better self-advocacy skills. One teaching assistant commented on what she called the "automatic assumption" of the disabled student that s/he cannot complete a task despite, even before proper accommodations have been tried. Specific comments from focus group participants included:

"Every new situation I would encounter, every time I had a student who had a disability I hadn't encountered before I would have to learn with them what kind of accommodations were necessary to be effective in my teaching."

"You can't pursue your students to the door and say, so what do you need?"

"In the end the choice becomes the student's. I mean, there's only so much you can do, they have to meet you somewhere in the middle."

Knowledge of Services and Level of Satisfaction

Describe your familiarity with services on your campus which provide accommodations to students with disabilities and your level of satisfaction (if applicable) with these services.

The teaching assistants in the focus group did not have much experience interacting with disabled student services. The teaching assistants' perception was that many teaching assistants do not know about the disabled student services office, although most of the teaching assistants present did know a bit about the services. The teaching assistants knew that the disabled student services office communicates the needs of disabled students to the faculty. The teaching assistants felt that disabled student services office could be improved if they were to send notification letters to teaching assistants, in addition to professors, at the beginning of each quarter. Specific statements from focus group participants included:

"I don't imagine many people really know anything about DSS [Disabled Student Services], particularly on the TA level."

"I don't know whether students actually bother to give their memos to their TAs. And, so, if they're not giving them to their TAs, then the TAs are not aware. It would be a very simple fix just to say to your students, the students who are requiring help, "Not only give it to your professor, but give it to your TA, just so they know that it's there.""

Professional Development Opportunities

Have you ever heard of or been offered professional development opportunities to learn how to work with students with disabilities?

None of the teaching assistants in the focus group had received any professional development regarding working with students with disabilities, even though they all reported that they had received some orientation to the teaching assistant role. One teaching assistant had heard that her department used to offer a disabled student services workshop to teaching assistants, but discontinued it because participants left feeling overwhelmed and incompetent. Specific remarks from focus group participants included:

"They used to have somebody come in from DSS to give a presentation, but they noticed that by the time the person was done doing the presentation from DSS, everybody in the room was really depressed and felt like they were incompetent. If you bring your TAs down to that level, they will start to shut down and not pay attention to you."

"I helped put on an orientation for a group of twenty TAs, and we have a Friday seminar every week with this group of TAs. We've never brought DSS in just to say, "Hey, we exist. We're here. Here's some information. Here's a phone number. Here's a contact name"."

What Teaching Assistants Need to Know

Tell me what you think teaching assistants need to know about working with students with disabilities.

Many teaching assistants stated that they want training in two major areas: pedagogy/teaching methods and disabilities. They said that they want to know the basics of good pedagogy; they want to know how to teach effectively and present materials in a way that is accessible to a diverse group of students. They also want training from the disabled student services office about disability issues. They said that the training should be basic and include a basic introduction to disabled student services, general information about disabilities, a few specifics and information on how and where to get more information. They do not want to be overwhelmed with too many specifics. Specific comments from focus group participants included:

"But there's just this overwhelming feeling I start to get when I start to listen to descriptions of everybody's disability and how its differently difficult for every different kind of disability."

"I also think that, maybe rather than the DSS person giving you all however many hundred disabilities that exist now, maybe it would be less depressing if you gave them general guidelines, and maybe some specific examples but not trying to cover all possible disabilities."

Preferred Methods of Delivery

If you were offered professional development on accommodating students with disabilities, which method(s) of delivery would you prefer and why?

Teaching assistant preferences and suggestions for professional development mirrored those of faculty: multiple delivery methods (written materials and workshops being mentioned specifically) attached to other meetings, training, or department activity would be preferred. Teaching assistants expressed a clear preference for department- and discipline-specific training about how to accommodate students with disabilities.

Other Teaching Assistant Priorities and Concerns

A couple of teaching assistants talked about the unique and multiple barriers that they face in trying to get information about working with students with disabilities. Within a

20 hour per week position, it is difficult to obtain training if they have to seek out resources and opportunities independently.

The training offered to teaching assistants appeared to vary widely between departments.

The teaching assistants who did have previous training in pedagogy expressed that they thought that the type of teaching methods that would reach students with disabilities were basically just good, inclusive teaching practices. One specific comment from a focus group participant included:

> *"The more ways you present the data, and the more senses are engaged , and the more interaction you encourage the students to have with the material, the better off it's going to be for everybody including the student with the disability."*

Implications for Professional Development and Institutionalization Strategies

The preliminary findings of the *DO-IT Prof* focus groups suggest that:

- A variety of training models is needed in order to meet the needs of a wide range of faculty. Some faculty prefer short workshops while others want longer seminars, and some faculty favor participatory workshops while others prefer independent learning on specific topics via online web sites or hard copy material. Part-time faculty may require different training delivery and support than full-time faculty.

- The following methods should be considered for delivery of professional development: participatory, hands-on workshops with case studies, short activities tagged onto larger meetings, peer-to-peer training from liaisons or colleagues in their departments, department-specific workshops, reference materials and notebooks, videos, online Web sites, and longer seminars.

- Faculty and teaching assistants want technical information that focuses on the accommodation methods rather than the specific disabilities. Faculty and teaching assistants requested information about the ADA, information about resources available to students with disabilities, information about how to access disabled student services, information on accommodation strategies and clarification on policies. They also requested limited information on specific disabilities, particularly "invisible" disabilities, information on how to handle medical and other emergencies, and insights into the students' perspectives. The relationship between good pedagogy and academic accommodations needs to be explored and made explicit.

- Training materials need to educate faculty and teaching assistants about their legal obligations to provide reasonable accommodations. Faculty have minimal information about the laws and find them vague and unclear. Faculty are not aware that accommodations usually entail incremental, not comprehensive, changes to courses and teaching methods.

- Training should address perceptions about classroom inequity while providing accommodations to students with disabilities. Faculty perceive ethical tensions when providing flexible and reasonable accommodations to students with disabilities.

- Strategies should be developed to foster and maintain an attitude of willingness toward accommodation for students with disabilities. Students with disabilities, faculty, and teaching assistants asserted that the key to successful accommodations is an attitude of willingness. Faculty and teaching assistants with this attitude seek out appropriate accommodations, information and technology.

- The training needs of teaching assistants are similar, but not identical, to those of faculty. Professional development for teaching assistants needs to be sensitive to the dual roles of student and instructor that teaching assistants must balance. Teaching assistants emphasized the need and desire for training about learning styles and pedagogy.

- Confidentiality (what it is and is not) needs to be emphasized; faculty perceive that they understand confidentiality, but students report breaches of confidentiality as a major concern.

- Students' communication and advocacy skills could be better developed.

- Because of a wide range of faculty and student experiences and perceptions, an effective plan to institutionalize and integrate services and programs should include a needs assessment tailored specifically for an individual campus.

A formal analysis of the data is underway, the results of which will appear in a paper.

References

Aksamit, D., Leuenberger, J., & Morris, M. (1987). Preparation of student services professionals and faculty for serving learning-disabled college students. Journal of College Student Personnel, 28, 53 – 59.

Astin, A. (1993). What matters in college: Four critical years revisited. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bateman, M. & Hossler, D. (1996). Exploring the development of postsecondary education plans among African American and White students. College and University, 72, 2 – 9.

Bean, J. (1992). *Conceptual models of student attrition.* In Pascarella, E.T. (Ed.). New directions for institutional research: Studying student attrition, 36. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Bers, T. & Smith, K. (1987). College choice and the nontraditional student. Community College Review, 15(1), 39 – 45.

Bouse, G.A. & Hossler, D. (1991). Studying college choice: A progress report. The Journal of College Admissions, 130, 11 – 15.

Burns, J.P., Armistead, L.P., & Keys, R.C. (1990). Developing a transition initiative program for students with handicapping conditions. Community/Junior College, 14, 319 – 329.

Changing America: The new face of science and engineering. (1989). Washington, D.C.

Chickering, A. & Reisser, L. (1996). *Key influences on student development*. In Stage et. al. (Eds.). College students: The evolving nature of research (ASHE Reader Series). Needham Heights, MA: Simon & Schuster.

Dunn, C. (1996). A status report on transition planning for individuals with learning disabilities. Journal of Learning Disabilities, 29(1), 17 – 30.

Fonosch, G.G., & Schwab, L.O. (1981). Attitudes of select university faculty members toward disabled students. Journal of College Student Personnel, 22, 229 – 235.

Horn, L. & Bobbitt, L. (1999). Students with disabilities in postsecondary education: A profile of preparation, participation, and outcomes. National Center for Education Statistics, U.S. Department of Education, Washington, D.C.

Levine, A. & Nidiffer, J. (1996). Beating the odds: how the poor get to college. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Leyser, Y., Vogel, S., Wyland, S. & Brulle, A. (1998). Faculty attitudes and practices regarding students with disabilities: Two decades after implementation of Section 504. Journal of Postsecondary Education and Disability, 13(2), 5 – 19.

Malcolm, S.M., & Matyas, M.L. (Eds.) (1991). Investing in human potential: Science and engineering at the crossroads. Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Seymour, E. & Hunter, A. (1998). Talking about disability: The education and work experience of graduates and undergraduates with disabilities in science, mathematics, and engineering majors. Washington, D.C.: American Association for the Advancement of Science.

Smith, K. (1990). A comparison of the college decision of two-year and four-year college students. College and University, 65(2), 109 – 125.

Spady, W. (1971). Dropouts from higher education: Toward an empirical model. Interchange, 2, 38 – 62.

Tinto, V. (1987). Leaving college: Rethinking the causes and cures of student attrition. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.